

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for January 26, 2000

Agenda Items

- Schematic Design Briefing on McClellan Station
- Schematic Design Briefing on Graham and Edmunds Stations

Commissioners Present

Jon Layzer, Chair
Matthew Kitchen
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Kenichi Nakano
Rick Sundberg
Paul Tomita

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Marty Curry, Planning Commission
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission
John Rahaim, Design Commission
Cheryl Sizov, LRRP

The meeting opened with introductions of Commissioners, staff, and guests, and a review of the agenda. Chair Jon Layzer reviewed the time allotted for each topic, requesting the presenters leave roughly half the time available for Panel discussion. He also reminded fellow Commissioners of the need to formalize Panel comments into an action at the end of each discussion; particularly important now that Sound Transit is moving into schematic design where timely and specific feedback on design elements is critical. He asked that staff transcribe the actions as soon as possible after the meeting.

Schematic Design Briefing on McClellan Station

Leslie Bain, Weinstein Copeland
Julie Blakeslee, OTAK
Joe Chauncey, Waterleaf
Dan Corson, STart
Gary Hartnett, OTAK

At community workshops last summer, community concerns focused on bus circulation and the location of the bus transfer facility. Based on community input, three alternatives were developed with community preference for a bus transfer facility on the current Kentucky Fried Chicken site east of the north end of the light rail station. This is the site Sound Transit is going forward with in station design work. Sound Transit is also working on transit-oriented development for this area, and will have more to report in the near future. With buses at the KFC location, 90% of Link passengers will approach the McClellan station from the north end, which is more densely developed. This frees up the south end to relate more to Cheasty Boulevard.

The architecture of the station is not seen as a container, but as a series of shifting planes. The south end can be "slower" with a part of Cheasty Boulevard underneath the station. We are also thinking of retail carts and a basketball court under the guideway, with metal mesh "fabric" to hide the utilities and guideway infrastructure. The guideway will be a steel structure with windscreen panels; the roof a complex arrangement of translucent planes uplit to glow at night. Sound Transit's internal design review expressed some concern about drainage off the roof which we are addressing by having water drain from one series of planes to another. This design celebrates the rain.

The area has a 65' height limit; we are proposing that transit-oriented development build to 5 or 6 stories with elements of the station into the plaza and a clear sightline from Rainier/MLK to the station.

The STart team is approaching the 30% designs by identifying opportunities system-wide, then moving into station opportunities. During 30% design, the artists are holding certain opportunities open, but otherwise allowing the design to develop further before getting into specific artworks and detailing. This is also an opportunity to figure out the best way to use available dollars. We are considering art in the underbelly of the guideway and in the plaza, although we have concerns about the aerial configuration of the station, and that the artwork not simply become blight mitigation. This is a confusing intersection. The station design starts with a whole structure at the north end that gradually breaks down into smaller pieces. The concept is "establishing order out of chaos."

With respect to the larger urban design issues, the focus is on the portal to touchdown of the aerial guideway. We've developed three options: a green wall, a stone wall, and the language of a bridge. The design started from a set of givens including the guideway itself. We are attempting to soften the impact of this structure on the surrounding streetscape. Landscaping presents the best opportunity to do this and also offers a chance to draw in some of the MLK Corridor ideas. With lots of retaining walls, we are exploring the use of grillwork for vines. At the ground plane, we can sculpt the surface, use river rock, or perhaps landscaping—although this presents a maintenance issue under the guideway. Lighting is focused on transforming the structure from more to less solid. We are carefully considering whether uses under the guideway are appropriate, but ultimately have to ask whether we really want people under the guideway. How much money should we spend underneath the structure? Another remaining urban design issue is how the alignment and Cheasty come together and relate to one another.

Discussion

- I have a question which, if we choose to ask it now, could take up the remaining discussion time—that question is whether this station should be aerial or whether we should be exploring an at-grade alignment.
- I agree that it should be discussed; the LRRP asked for information about an at-grade alignment at its September 22nd meeting and also requested it in writing in its first Progress Report.
- I also have questions regarding massing of the station and a potential alley vacation.
- So it is agreed that the LRRP wanted to see an explanation of an at-grade alignment—the pros and cons. Let's hear from Sound Transit why we aren't getting this explanation, after which let's hear from the consultants on what they think about an at-grade alignment. *(Sound Transit responded saying that a discussion about an at-grade alignment did occur with Seatran earlier in the process and problems arose regarding traffic circulation and flow. We can get you more information.)*
- I understand that an at-grade alignment may even be more cost-effective. *(There have been 5 or 6 at-grade alternatives but there are issues regarding entering the facility and the way the guideway would exit Beacon Hill would ultimately push the station further onto Cheasty Boulevard. SPO staff said that their understanding is that Seatran still has outstanding questions about how traffic would be affected by an at-grade alignment but hasn't definitively said yes or no to an at-grade alignment.)*

At this point, Jon Layzer asked Cheryl Sizov to follow-up with Seatran and Sound Transit staff prior to the next meeting. He then asked the consultants if an at-grade alignment would completely change the design solution they have developed thus far, to which they answered "yes." Jack Mackie then stated that he would be willing to continue the review of today's presentation, but would do so under protest. He said he is hesitant to review this work given that previous requests by the Panel for more information on

other alternatives have been ignored. There was general agreement that LRRP would not recommend approval of the McClellan design until additional information is provided regarding a potential at-grade alignment. Given that, LRRP agreed to comment on the current proposal and discussion continued:

- Can the alley between the proposed TOD and station be vacated? *(We believe the gas station needs access via the alley for its trucks.)*
- The design of the Link station and the bus facility should be designed in tandem so they read as one.
- This is really an question of scope in that the McClellan station is suffering from a lack of urban design analysis. Does this proposal include a realignment of MLK. *(Yes.)* In showing the future transit-oriented development as a landmark for the station, you are depending on private developers who may or may not perform as desired. How can you guarantee the plaza will develop as a forecourt to the station as shown in your drawings?
- If Sound Transit owns the property, they could and should build certain design requirements into any future use in order to guarantee the plaza will be there and developed as envisioned. *(The scope of Sound Transit's work is just 1/3 of what the entire project is.)*
- I'm puzzled by the roof and the use of metal mesh or, what seems like, chain-mail. Should you call attention to the roof or just let it disappear? *(The elevated guideway is 32' in the air and there are design requirements regarding covering the sidewalks, etc. Vancouver B.C. covers their sidewalks very solidly. We're trying to reduce the scale with smaller elements and differing roof planes.)*
- I like the breakdown of the roof structure, but would support a more "building-like" appearance at the north end. I also like the play with water and feel that should be explored further.
- Depending on what happens at the ground plane, should the roof disappear or not? I still have questions about that. The other approach is to design the north end as a building. *(We did consider that but it resulted in a 60' tall structure, plus we would need a private developer to make it work.)*
- Can you incorporate mixed use development into the structure? *(Elise Conti is working on some TOD proposals, but nothing is firm yet. Artists are supportive of small neighborhood businesses and spaces for simple services.)*
- We have plenty of time to focus on the art, but I do hope the artists will influence the issues of use of public space. These need to be actively peopled places and we need to look at how to make that happen.
- At community meetings, people expressed a desire to treat the guideway as a building, and think of it as a town center not an open structure. Essentially a building with a moving roof.
- Why are we reviewing this particular design scheme if there is so much still in flux with respect to transit-oriented development? On the other hand, if this is the design direction, there are some real issues of evenness of the pieces. The design needs more hierarchy to be legible. I am also concerned about the long term—e.g. 30 years from now—appearance. Presently there is almost a "fair-like" quality to it. *(Consultants: We've been wondering ourselves if in 30 years we'll all be trying to find ways to take it down, in the same way we discuss removing the Alaskan Way Viaduct. We are very concerned about this. This design is trying to diminish the visual impact of the structure, and is more destructive than crossing at grade on Cheasty. This is the equivalent of about 1/2 of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, and from an urban design standpoint is ill-advised. There is the potential to save money by developing an at-grade scheme. If there is a will, there's a way to solve the traffic problem—Portland crosses at-grade. An at-grade station could be a real positive for the town center. Keeping people on the ground is important. We can write design guidelines for transit-oriented development, but realistically an at-grade station would likely be more viable economically.)*
- Who's responsibility is it to tie this design in with the MLK Corridor design? I'm intrigued by the water idea and what happens when water hits the ground. Don't let it just go into a drain pipe!

A community member added that in her opinion, the important structure in this area is Franklin High School, and she had hoped to see that character expressed in the station design. The station must have presence.

Jon Layzer called for a motion on the McClellan station, and the following was approved unanimously:

Recommendation on McClellan Station

The Seattle Light Rail Review Panel commends the consultants for a thorough presentation, but nonetheless votes unanimously not to recommend approval of the schematic design as presented for McClellan station.

The urban design impact of the proposed aerial alignment is of such importance that the Panel requests analysis of other design alternatives, specifically an at-grade alignment and station. Noting that previous requests for information on a potential at-grade alignment have not been met, the Panel reiterates its request for presentation of an at-grade design solution at a subsequent schematic design presentation. Staff is also directed to work closely with Seatran and Sound Transit in preparation for another presentation. The Panel requests that this presentation focus on a discussion of the elements required to make an at-grade design work; as opposed to a feasibility analysis or enumeration of reasons why at-grade does not work.

The Panel further comments that the following design issues were not adequately addressed in the McClellan schematic design presentation, and requests that Sound Transit and its consultants address these issues in a subsequent presentation:

- ***How impacts of the aerial guideway on the streetscape would be mitigated;***
- ***Design of the transition structure and its touchdown on MLK;***
- ***Design of the tunnel portal and the aerial structure between the portal and station;***
- ***Treatment of the plaza that is potentially to be bounded by transit-oriented development; and***
- ***Coordination between the design of the light rail station and the bus transfer facility.***

Whether the alignment is aerial or at-grade, the Panel also requests additional design work on the following elements associated with the McClellan station:

- ***Transit-oriented development guidelines for private development on sites controlled by Sound Transit as a means to ensure development that is supportive of light rail as well as quality urban design of the plaza and other public spaces for this future town center;***
- ***Further discussion of the potential retail/mixed-use development and its relationship to the station;***
- ***Urban design relationship of the station and alignment to Cheasty Boulevard, and***
- ***An urban design analysis for the entire light rail/bus/TOD area as a whole prepared collaboratively by Sound Transit, the City, and Metro.***

Jon Layzer added a few other comments after the motion had been acted upon, suggesting a possible future LRRP session to specifically address landscaping issues as per recommendations in the last Progress Report. Others added that this makes sense in light of the Great Streets work being planned for MLK.

Schematic Design Briefing on Edmunds and Graham Stations

Barbara Alten, Arai Jackson

Margot Arellano, Arai Jackson

Norie Sato, STart

Mark Spitzer, Arai Jackson

We will not be presenting on the MLK Corridor tonight and, in fact, we are moving away from the Great Streets idea as a kind of Haussman design ideal to the “family of stations” idea for MLK. The Edmunds station is presented here as a single-loaded platform accessible from Edmunds Street. A small plaza at Edmunds will house the functional elements such the TPSS structure, among casually arranged elements and different colors and textures at the pavement. Because of safety issues, we are proposing a collector zone at one end of the platform. We are still discussing where the train stops if there are just two cars—this also affects the canopy design. We are taking Craftsman approach to the canopy:

- a trellis quality to bring the scale of the roof down
- tentatively made of steel with a masonry base
- 4' modules for glazing
- objects (possibly granite or stone) at the entrance to serve as gateway elements

We are proposing a pair of trees at every street light, with other species of trees in-between. We hope to get community feedback on this tomorrow evening. The four stations really have to be looked at together—should they be thematically linked or have stand-alone identities? Corridor-wide the art idea is “Islands in the Stream” with use of the 14 leftover triangles of land for art and landscaping elements. The Edmunds station is depicted as abstracted grasses moving in the wind, potentially with a microphone in the base to pick up sounds. The artists are also identifying opportunities now at 30% for later involvement of other artists.

The Graham station is similar to Edmunds, with an entrance off Graham Street and a long triangular plaza at the southeast corner of the intersection. The plaza will house the TPSS structure, bike storage, and a water feature or other feature at the center. The platform is single-loaded with canopies at either end. The theme is “looking to the future:”

- Vertical columns
- Tubular steel band
- A railing suggesting someone “leaning” back from the train/track area
- Niches for sitting in

At Sound Transit's request, the canopies are similar at all stations to provide a consistent approach to the roof form, however there will be different materials among the stations. The Graham station will not be developed much past 30% design since it is on the “deferred” list.

Discussion

- I liked the earlier “necklace of jewels” concept at stations—what happened to that? *(We'll be developing pedestrian lighting all along the length of MLK.)*
- Is that a road behind the Graham plaza? *(Yes, a paratransit drop-off.)*
- Will there be a TPSS structure here regardless of whether a station is built? *(No, we may switch the location to Othello.)*

- How are you planning to bring the Columbia City historic district into the design? Also, what about drawing from the cultural identity of the community? *(We are still working on the Edmunds connection, but have some ideas such as carrying brick pavers as sidewalk borders, globe streetlights, and a Craftsman approach to design. We need to scale these elements to fit within the residential area through which they will pass. Regarding cultural identity, there are so many cultural connections to draw from we are reluctant to "assign" one per station. We are looking at the Pacific Rim for inspiration, trying for an abstracted cultural reference without pinpointing a specific culture. Many of the cultures represented in the Rainier Valley share a predilection for building things out of many small pieces vs. a few massive building elements—we're trying to draw from that observation as well.)*
- What about a kiosk in the plaza for people to post their own messages and express their own culture?
- Perhaps the design could include things that could change over time to reflect a changing community.
- I can't believe this station is still being designed as single-loaded. *(Sound Transit has just put Edmunds on the list to be changed to double-loaded, but we are waiting for a cost analysis before finalizing that decision.)*
- How does that affect the design being presented tonight? *(It would change it.)*
- Look at the December 10th workshop results. Alaska Street is just as important as Edmunds, especially in light of the Rainier Vista master plan.
- The literal interpretation of the Craftsman style in the canopy doesn't work well—separating the trellis element from the canopy glazing is awkward. *(We recognize that as well, but are also trying to ensure ease of maintenance, which is an issue for Sound Transit.)*
- I'm wondering about the wall and people crossing over it. The seating also needs to be addressed now or else we run the risk of losing it in cost-cutting later on—try integrated seating within the masonry wall.
- Making recommendations on an MLK Corridor landscaping plan now may be premature until we decide what MLK wants to be. What type of Great Street or Wonderful Street are we creating?
- The microphone in the artwork idea seems to add little—this area will be too noisy for the subtleties of sound it would pick up. The artwork is also not well integrated into the canopies.
- But sound could be an element of barrier-free access for the visually impaired.
- What about the art program markers we heard about earlier? *(We are still considering this; trying to determine locations and budget. They would probably be placed outside entrances at intersections; perhaps 17" to 24" high.)*
- Would these be separate objects?
- I've never seen a single-loaded platform—they all become ad hoc double-loaded in that people use them that way! Safety issues need to be taken into consideration here. In the winter people may load at the ends, but in the spring could enter at the center. Where is the landscaping on the platform and how wide is the platform? *(We are not proposing any trees on the platform because of interference with the OCS and leaves on the tracks.)*
- Any creative landscape architect can work around those concerns. It is shortsighted to eliminate landscaping on those grounds. *(The Rainier Valley has a tradition of using rosa rugosas along its streets—we may pull this idea in.)*
- It doesn't necessarily have to be trees, but something is needed to create places that people want to be in, there in the middle of the street.
- Did we see different angles before on the canopies? *(Yes, but we've moved toward a more system-wide design.)*
- I am saddened that Graham station won't be going further, because the design is very elegant. The overarching principle the Panel is trying to make is to humanize these stations in every way possible

with landscaping and art and other features. Sound Transit needs to give good reasons why this can't be accomplished, otherwise these will be very desolate places.

- Perhaps the theme is "Desert Islands in the Stream!"
- I appreciate the "tango" between standardized and custom design, but still have concerns over whether the angle of the roof is an identifying element that must be consistent among all stations. *(That earlier variety has sifted out to a standard design that still expresses distinctive identities within the same general roof plane.)*

Jon Layzer concluded the discussion and asked for a motion to approve or not approve the design. The Panel voted as follows:

Recommendation on Edmunds Station

The Panel commends the consultants for a thorough presentation on the Edmunds station, but nonetheless voted not to recommend approval of the schematic design as presented.

The Panel requests that the consultants redesign the station to reflect the change of the Edmunds platform from single-loaded to double-loaded, with special attention to the following elements:

- ***Landscaping on the platform, along the street, and on the station plaza;***
- ***Ideas for creatively handling water runoff and drainage at the station;***
- ***Access to the station from Alaska Street and coordination with future Rainier Vista development;***
- ***Edmunds Street improvements and connection to the Columbia City historic district and business area;***
- ***Further resolution of the balance between standardized elements for Link and custom elements that give local identity; and***
- ***Additional thought as to how the community's cultural history and identity might be expressed in the station design—not in the sense of literal references, but possibly through artwork or changing displays or connections to nearby cultural institutions.***

The Panel requests that Sound Transit present a revised design at a subsequent schematic design presentation.

Recommendation on Graham Station

The Panel commends the consultants for a thorough presentation and elegant design for the Graham station. The Panel expresses disappointment that the design will not be going forward since the Graham station is being deferred. The Panel recommends approval of the design as presented to date, requesting that additional design work be brought to the Panel for review if the status of the station changes in the future.

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 pm.